

COMMUNITY ISSUES

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Overview

To gain a comprehensive understanding of issues and concerns that were important to the community, a series of public meetings, community surveys, interviews and other exercises were conducted throughout the planning process.

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee used the results of these activities to identify and prioritize the most important community issues before developing strategies to address them.

It is important to note at the outset most people are very pleased with the overall quality of life in Stonington and some residents did not offer any opinion on how things could be improved in the community. In fact, 92 percent of residents rate the overall quality of life in Stonington as good or very good.

“It is really the community itself which must try to pull together ... in order to preserve those things that the community values and to foster the growth and change that the community wants.”

Russell Peterson
Former EPA Director

Workshop Meetings



Public Meetings



Telephone Survey



Working Meetings



Residents clearly value Stonington's open spaces as well as scenic and historic character.

Things to Encourage ...

At a meeting early in the planning process, residents were asked to identify things in Stonington that they were particularly proud of.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that make their community special to them and things they would like to encourage in the future.

	"Prouds" in Stonington	Votes
Open Space	Barn Island, river parks, preserved open space, village greens, nature trails, and farmland.	122
Community Facilities	Police Station, community centers, schools, libraries, Town Hall, fire departments, transfer station	90
Unique Facilities	Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, Mystic Seaport, Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center, Mystic Information Center	65
Villages / Neighborhoods	Mystic, Pawcatuck, Stonington Borough, Mason's Island	50
Coastal Resources	Harbors, coves, lighthouses, public access, boating, fishing, scenery, waterfront homes, Town Docks, marinas	46
Community Character	Variety: urban, rural, suburban; mills, farms, scenery, history	42

Open Space



Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center



Things to Discourage ...

Residents were also asked to identify things in Stonington that they were particularly sorry about.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that concern them about their community and its direction and things they would like to discourage in the future.

Residents also expressed desire for improved transportation facilities, diverse housing opportunities and appropriate economic development.

	"Sorrys" in Stonington	Votes
Transportation Issues	RT 1, RT 2, RT 27 (development, traffic, intersections), I-95, Amtrak, Casino traffic, truck traffic, bridges, lack of bikeways, paths, mass transit, wheelchair access, village parking.	157
Residential Patterns	Too many large homes, trailer parks, lack of affordable and elderly housing, high-density housing, housing blight, sprawl	46
Business Patterns	Strip centers, Exit 90 area, lack of business sites, need businesses for taxes and jobs, no industrial parks, overdeveloped tourism, poor shopping, scattered commercial development, underutilized industrial buildings, vacant factory outlets	39
Utilities	Sewage treatment plants, overhead wires, cell towers, lack of sewers expansion, limited DSL service	50
Community Character	Mechanic Street blight, sprawl, Monsanto mill, bright lights, business infringing on neighborhoods, too much construction	30

New Home Under Construction



Trailer Park



Residents overwhelmingly identified Conservation Issues as the most important theme for inclusion in the Plan, which is consistent with the value that residents place in Stonington's open spaces and community character

Things to Focus On ...

In other exercises, residents were asked to identify the top issues they were concerned about that might be addressed in a Plan of Conservation and Development.

In one exercise at a public meeting in October 2002, residents were asked to identify, from a list of topics typically addressed in a Plan, the issues most important to them. These results were compared with the results of a random sample telephone survey of Stonington residents in November 2003.

Primary Issues

	Source	Percent
Open Space	Public Meeting	26%

Preserving open space was the most important issue to residents attending the public meetings. The telephone survey confirmed this sentiment with the following results.

Open Space	Source	Response
Stonington should preserve more open space.	Telephone Survey	61%
Stonington should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails.	Telephone Survey	78%
Stonington should require open space as part of every new development.	Telephone Survey	77%,
Would pay \$50 more per year in taxes, to have the Town acquire more open space.	Telephone Survey	51%

Open Space



Major Secondary Issues

	Source	Percent
Education	Telephone Survey	19%
Taxes	Telephone Survey	18%
Natural Resources	Public Meeting	15%
Business Development	Public Meeting	12%

In the telephone survey, residents identified education and taxes as issues they were concerned about. More than half of all residents surveyed (55%) felt that taxes in Stonington were too high for the level and quality of services provided by the Town, while two-fifths (39%) thought taxes were about right.

At the public meetings, residents wanted to protect natural resources and encourage business development (primarily to reduce the residential tax burden).

While protecting natural resources was a major issue for residents attending public meetings, almost three quarters of residents surveyed by telephone felt that Stonington is doing a good job protecting natural resources. This may reflect an overall concern about the perception of development and possible future impacts.

Business development was an important issue identified by residents. The telephone survey results tabulated below confirm these mixed feelings.

Business Development	Source	Response
Stonington could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial development in town.	Telephone Survey	64%
The area surrounding Route 2 at I-95 should be developed with a variety of commercial uses.	Telephone Survey	55%
Stonington should encourage a variety of uses in village areas.	Telephone Survey	75%
Stonington should create flexible regulations to encourage historic mill development.	Telephone Survey	67%
The Town should work with the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, Mystic Seaport, and other organizations on projects for everyone's mutual benefit.	Telephone Survey	91%

While the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration and Mystic Seaport are tax-exempt institutions, residents clearly recognize their importance to the local economy, community character and quality of life.

Other Secondary Issues

Community character was another planning issue areas identified as important by residents. A number of factors can influence community character such as development patterns, historic resources and scenic resources. The survey confirms residents' strong feelings towards protecting community character.

Other issues considered by residents to have some importance included pedestrian and bicycle circulation, historic resources, over-development, and village enhancement.

Community Character	Source	Response
Stonington is doing a good job protecting historic resources.	Telephone Survey	86%
Stonington should do more to protect scenic resources.	Telephone Survey	72%
The Town should do more to protect scenic stone walls, street trees and barns.	Telephone Survey	69%
	Source	Percent
Community Character	Public Meeting	8%
Pedestrian/Bicycle Circulation	Public Meeting	7%
Historic Resources	Public Meeting	7%
Over-Development	Telephone Survey	7%
Village Enhancement	Public Meeting	5%

Community Character



Tertiary Issues

Other issues that were of concern to residents included vehicular circulation, housing needs community facilities, utilities, and residential development.

	Source	Percent
Vehicular Circulation	Public Meeting	4%
Housing Needs	Public Meeting	4%
Community Facilities	Public Meeting	4%
Utilities	Public Meeting	4%
Residential Development	Public Meeting	3%

Age-Restricted Housing



Overall Plan Direction

Overall Philosophy

Based on public meeting exercises, Steering Committee input, and the results of the random telephone survey, the overall guiding philosophy of this Plan is to:

**Protect and enhance
Stonington's community character and
high quality of life.**

Themes

To accomplish this goal, the Plan has been organized under the following themes.

Themes	Components
Protect Important Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preserve open space• Protect natural resources• Conserve coastal resources• Protect historic resources• Preserve scenic resources
Protect and Enhance the Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reinforce village development patterns• Re-use the mills
Guide Appropriate Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve residential development patterns• Address changing housing needs• Protect existing neighborhoods• Guide appropriate business development• Address the impacts and needs of institutional uses• Support desired development patterns
Address Community Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address community facility needs• Ensure a safe and efficient transportation system